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cc Mr. [unclear]
Mr. O'Halloran
Mr. Hamill
[unclear]
[unclear] 20/5

AMBASSADE D'IRLANDE
17 Grosvenor Place
London SW1X 7HR

19th May 1977

Secretary
Department of Foreign Affairs

Attention Mr Pat Hennessy

Mr. Donelan
To see, please
Hodge is clearly
impervious to
argument!

HS 23/5

I wish to report that I recently had lunch with Mr Michael Hodge, Republic of Ireland Department, Foreign and Commonwealth Office. While I have always found it difficult to get a precise clarification of Hodge's role within the Republic of Ireland Department I gather that he is responsible, inter alia, for the Foreign Office's interest in internal Northern Ireland affairs, cross border security cooperation and the effects of the Northern Ireland situation on Britain's external relations. Some of the following points made by Hodge in the course of our conversation may be of interest to the Department.

The Aftermath of the Strike

He was obviously pleased by the outcome of the strike and the new status which, in his view, had now been attained by the Secretary of State in the eyes of the people of Northern Ireland. Indeed he said that after having worked hard to achieve this particular position Mason and his officials were very conscious that he might not remain there for a very long time either to enjoy the satisfaction or to capitalise on the benefits because of the constant risk of an early general election. Hodge said that he was not optimistic about the immediate effects of the strike on grass-roots opinion in Northern Ireland. Many people in Northern Ireland had agreed with the objectives of the strike and in particular the security objective but the Secretary of

see note at
1... end.

Mr O'Dwyer
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State had been able to divert support away from the strike principally because of the widespread use of intimidation and the open-ended nature of the stoppage. Hodge's wife, who comes from Northern Ireland, had visited her mother in Larne and was present throughout the duration of the strike. She said that there had been a great deal of intimidation in Larne but that it had resulted in the alienation of the vast majority of ordinary people in the area who would otherwise have supported virtually any initiative proposed by Paisley.

The most beneficial aspect of the strike in political terms as he saw it was the new political climate which had emerged within the various "Unionist" parties. It had certainly driven a wedge between the DUP-UUUM and the Official Unionist Party. With regard to any new political initiative he said that the Secretary of State still firmly believed that the basis for an initiative must come from local agreement and that this in effect would require some accommodation between the SDLP and the Official Unionists. He thought, however, that a new range of political possibilities could emerge with the re-entry of Mrs Dickson and William Craig as contributors to Official Unionist thinking. He considered that an important test of the political implications of the strike would take place in the context of the Local Government elections and that the strike might have had the beneficial effect of helping to break what some commentators were suggesting was the apathy of the moderate and power-sharing voters.

The RUC

He thought that the RUC had significantly increased their stature in the community as a result of their performance during the strike. I gather that certainly at official level here Mr Fitt's statement praising the role and effectiveness of the RUC during the strike had been particularly welcomed. He said that such statements coming

from the SDLP were welcome because of the parties "intransigence" on the whole question of supporting, and encouraging Catholics to join, the RUC. He said that the Northern Ireland Office continued to be concerned about the low level of Catholic membership of the RUC and are anxious to avail of any opportunity to create the conditions which will lead to a more balanced representation of the two communities within the force. He was not, however, specific on any new "conditions" which might be under consideration.

Ulster Defence Regiment

Remarks about the RUC led to a brief discussion of the Ulster Defence Regiment and I asked him if there was any substance to recent Press reports that more adequate vetting procedures for applicants to the UDR were being considered. He avoided answering the question by talking about the difficulty he experienced in understanding the Dublin Government's continued criticism of the UDR, which he stressed on a number of occasions is a regiment of the British Army. I said that our concern about the UDR was not difficult to understand given the evidence indicating the over-lap in membership between the UDA and the UDR, the number of charges which have been brought against individual members of the UDR, many of which have been subsequently proved before the Courts, as well as some of the more obvious and well known incidents in which they have been involved, including the Miami Showband tragedy. This led him to remind me that the UDA is not an illegal organisation in Northern Ireland which he nevertheless hastened to add did not mean that when its members were suspected of being involved in illegal activities they were not prosecuted. I said that I needed no reminding that, after the events of the strike and the many other occasions on which the UDA had been condemned even by individuals like Paisley, it was not an illegal organisation.

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He said that he accepted that the UDR was not beyond criticism but indeed neither were the security forces South of the Border. I asked him if he had any particular incidents in mind which gave rise to concern about our security forces to which he replied that on a recent occasion the British Army had stopped a group of young men from the Creggan at a check-point to discover that they were members of the Irish Army returning to the South after completing a period of home leave in Northern Ireland. While he was not making any particular complaint which he wanted investigated he nevertheless had been left with the impression by the British Army personnel at the check-point that the Creggan group had been particularly unpleasant towards them. They were allowed to continue on their journey after the normal check had been made with the Gardaí. I told him that I was particularly pleased that this was the only example which he could recall as a basis of comparison with the many proved and outrageous misdeeds of individual members of the UDR.

Cross Border Communication

Hodge said that he had always been very anxious to know the real reason for our refusal to agree to Army to Army contacts or even Army to Garda contacts and thus to give greater effect to cross border security cooperation. He had always been left with the impression that our attitude had something to do with a historical dislike of the British Army and he thought at times that it might be worth making the point that the British Army and in particular the SAS were not a modern version of the Black and Tans. I said that we for our part often found it very difficult to understand why our position, often repeated, could never be accepted at its face value. There was, as I am sure he has been told on many occasions, a clearly defined legal relationship between the Army and the Gardaí. I understood that an exceptionally good relationship

and liaison existed between these two bodies and that we were always willing and indeed anxious to investigate any sustainable criticism of their efficiency and effectiveness in patrolling our side of the Border. Nevertheless, the Garda authorities had the responsibility in law for maintaining security and it seems sensible that their opposite numbers in Northern Ireland should work together with them in achieving this. What often seemed strange to me were the apparent difficulties which existed between the British Army and the RUC in patrolling the Northern side of the Border.

He said that cross border terrorist incidents were now running at a level of 1 - 2 per week and he was not satisfied that direct Army to Garda contact would not substantially increase the effectiveness of cross border security. He thought that joint operations might be mounted but when I pressed him to define what he meant by 'joint operations' he said that the Gardaí might lure "some of the boys" out of their hiding places and push them gently into the hands of the waiting security forces North of the Border. I said that this sort of security gimmick could only be superficially attractive and indeed I thought it would diminish rather than increase the respect for the Rule of Law which it must be the function of the two Governments to restore and maintain in Northern Ireland.

Warsaw Peace Congress

I asked Hodge if he had received any reports about the discussions at the Warsaw Peace Congress which I had previously heard about from the First Secretary at the Polish Embassy who told me that he was dealing with the visa applications from both the Irish and British "delegates". Hodge said that the only factual piece of information that had come his way was that Mrs Norney - mother of Leo Norney -- was to attend the Conference. Hodge said that the Foreign

most recent
four weeks had
no reported
incidents

Office had sent a comprehensive briefing to the British Embassy at Warsaw in the event of Mrs Norney making any statement on the circumstances of her son's death at the Conference. As far as he was aware Mrs Norney did not make any statement whatsoever at the Conference.

I then referred to Press reports that both the Irish and British delegations had issued a joint statement requesting both Governments to refer the matter of Northern Ireland to the United Nations. This led Hodge to rehearse what he referred to as the practical and political difficulties of such a course as well as mentioning the inherent objection of giving the United Nations an opportunity to comment on the internal affairs of the United Kingdom. In the course of referring to the practical objections to the proposal of involving the United Nations and to introducing a peace-keeping force into the area he said that Prime Minister Trudeau had made it clear to the Irish Government that he would not permit Canadian troops to become involved at any stage in any United Nations peace-keeping exercise in Northern Ireland. I said that I was not aware that the matter had ever been raised with the Prime Minister of Canada.

Hodge said that they were far less concerned about the Warsaw meeting than they were about the forthcoming Belgrade Conference. All the indications were that the Soviet Union would exploit, to the full, the Strasbourg case and cause the maximum of embarrassment to the British Government as a result of the case. He agreed, however, that the statements by the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Attorney General regarding Soviet comments on the case had been particularly helpful and he said that they were very much appreciated at Government and official level here.

Richard A O'Brien
Richard A O'Brien
First Secretary.

(* Yes. I think Trudeau said this to the Taoiseach during his 1978(?) visit here. I sent the minutes of the meeting for filing. I imagine the other Political Division has a copy. J.W. 25/11

This is being checked out
J.W.